



The *Mer de l'Ouest* [Sea of the West] of North America is a myth that was prevalent for over 150 years during the 17th and 18th centuries and displayed in various forms on maps from that period. The research and inventory of the maps displaying this myth has been done admirably by Don McGuirk in his e-book titled *The Last Great Cartographic Myth: Mer de l'Ouest*.

The bulk of this work is a carto-bibliography of over 200 maps that depict the cartographic myth of a *Mer de l'Ouest*. In his Introduction, McGuirk states that most often, cartographic myths did not arise from pure speculation. They were based on the information available to the cartographer at the time and his or her interpretation of that information.

When explorers first sailed the eastern seaboard of North America, most thought that they were sailing the eastern coast of Asia. As such, there was no western coast of North America, as North America did not exist. Once it became apparent that this body of land was not Asia but a new and distinct continent, speculation as to its extent and configuration began. Explorers were still particularly looking for a water- route to Asia through this New World that apparently had no real treasure to offer Europe. So all of the potential rivers were explored with this objective in mind, beginning with the St Lawrence River and the Great Lakes, Hudson Bay, the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, etc. The following is an excerpt from Henry Wagner's book *Cartography of the Northwest Coast of America to 1800*.

In June, 1708, of the *Monthly Miscellany*, or *Memoirs for the Curious* a weird tale appeared which purported to be a letter from an Admiral Bartholomew de Fonte concerning his discoveries in the course of a voyage from Callao, Peru, to find out if there was any northwest passage between the Atlantic Ocean and the South and Tartarian seas. Fonte was supposed to have discovered a river which he called "Los Reyes" in 53° N Lat., and a vast archipelago which he named "St. Lazarus." Having advanced through various channels, he finally encountered a ship from Boston commanded by a Captain Shapley. Obviously this vessel had reached that point from the Atlantic Ocean, and thus it would be natural to suppose that a passage did exist between the Atlantic and the Pacific. Nevertheless, at the end of the letter Fonte states that they found out that there was no passage into the South Sea-nothing that could be called the Northwest Passage. When we come to examine the voyage we find that a good part of it was taken from William Dampier's *New Voyage*, first published in 1697, and from William Hack's maps. The first person who seems to have taken any stock in the story was Arthur Dobbs, who became interested in the search for a northwest passage. In 1737 Captain Christopher Middleton explored Hudson's Bay for the Hudson's Bay Company, but without finding any exit from the bay to the west. Dobbs, dissatisfied with these results, took up the matter with the government, and in large part as a result of his insistence two small vessels were sent out in 1741, again under the command of Middleton. Middleton had no greater success on this voyage than on the first, and on his return Dobbs, in 1744, published his *Account of the countries adjoining to Hudson's Bay*, in which he denounced Middleton because he had not explored two or three inlets in the western part of Hudson's Bay, alleging that he was acting in the interests of the Hudson's Bay Company, which did not wish the passage to be found because the discovery would interfere with its monopoly. With the book, Dobbs issued a map which purports to have been made by Joseph La France and printed in the text a narrative of La France's adventures. None of the alleged discoveries of Fonte are shown on this map, but Dobbs inserted an abstract of the Fonte letter in which he announced

that he was a believer in it, although with some reservations, and even stated that the discoveries were probably not part of America. In 1745 a bill passed Parliament which authorized a payment of a reward of £20,000 to the discoverer of the Northwest Passage. As a result of this, and no doubt also because of the charges made by Dobbs, another expedition was sent out in 1746 by a new company to explore the inlets which Middleton had neglected to examine. Full accounts of this voyage were published in 1748 by Henry Ellis and by Theodore Swaine Drage, the clerk of the *California*, one of the ships, and each of them published a map. Ellis laid no great stress on Fonte's story but nevertheless apparently believed in it. His map, like that of Dobbs, has the Lahontan geography, though in somewhat different fashion. Drage, however, constructed a map which he called *A Chart for the better understanding of De Font's letter*, made up from the alleged Fonte narrative. He thought the Archipelago of St. Lazarus was the *Strait of Anian*. In 1749 Dobbs issued a small pamphlet in which he identified Fonte's Lake Fonte with the sea said to have been found by Juan de Fuca, but in the following year news reached England that the hitherto unexplored inlets in Hudson's Bay had been found by the company's employees to be closed.

In 1747 Joseph Nicolas Delisle returned to Paris from Russia, where he had been living for some years in the employ of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. He was acquainted with the recent Russian discoveries in Alaska, and on April 8, 1750, he read before the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris a memoir in which he gave an abridged history of these discoveries and an account of Fonte's expedition. He enlisted in his support Philippe Buache, his brother-in-law, and the manuscript map which was filed with Delisle's memoir was drawn by Buache. This map was printed in 1752 by Delisle with his *Explication* and is entitled: *Carte des Nouvelles Decouvertes au Nord de la Mer du Sud*. In November, 1752, the map was reissued with some changes as *Carte generale des Decouvertes de l' Amiral de Fonte*, and is usually found in Delisle's *Nouvelles Cartes de Decouvertes de L' Amiral de Fonte* dated 1753. A long dispute now began over the merit of the maps and the authenticity of the discoveries, lasting until the end of the century. In this controversy the *Rio de Santa Inez* of Vizcaino, generally known at that time as the *Entree de Martin de Aguilar*, cut a large figure. To the north of this there was still another one, known as the *Entree de Juan de Fuca*, now commemorated in the Strait of Fuca which separates the United States from Vancouver Island. Fuca was the author of another apocryphal tale about discoveries on the northwest coast and was said to have entered some strait there for a long distance inland. This tale had been printed by Samuel Purchas in 1625 in his *Pilgrimes*.

Fuca's voyage was supposed to have taken place in 1592. All that we know about it is contained in some correspondence of Michael Lok and the account in Purchas. There is no evidence whatever that the Spaniards sent any expedition up the northwest coast in 1592 or in any other year after the Cabrillo expedition of 1542, until the Vizcaino expedition of 1602. Fuca, however, was no doubt a real individual. Sufficient contemporary evidence can be found in the Spanish archives to corroborate some of his story. Other parts of his tale were either misunderstood or mis-stated by Lok, who met him in Venice in 1596 and was anxious to secure some support for his own theories about the Northwest Passage. If we examine Lok's map of 1582 (#419) in the *Divers Voyages* we see that the outlet of his strait into the Pacific occupies much the same position as that assigned to it in the Fuca narrative. Many people believe this story without taking the trouble to check the statements against the actualities. In his account of his interview with Fuca, Lok states that Fuca pointed out to him on one of Lok's own maps the course of his voyage until he came to a latitude of 47°, where he found a broad inlet between 47° and 48° through which he sailed for twenty days, and which became even broader and broader. He even alleged that he had reached the North Sea and thence returned to Acapulco.

I have no doubt that Fuca was the Greek referred to as "George" in the account of the Cavendish expedition. He was captured in a small barque somewhere north of Valparaiso and was taken along by Cavendish, who must have put him ashore at Cabo San Lucas after capturing

the Santa Ana on November 14, 1587. Wagner thinks that in all probability he was the same man that Sir Francis Drake had captured in December, 1577, in the Harbor of Valparaiso. In the account of that affair he was named "Juan" and was referred to also as a Greek. Fuca himself said he had been captured by Cavendish on the Santa Ana and that he had lost 60,000 pesos, a perfectly improbable story, as no one on the *Santa Ana* lost 60,000 pesos. In Valparaiso, however, Drake had robbed the Greek's vessel of a large amount of gold.

Out of the Fuca story Delisle and Buache seem to have manufactured the *Mer de l'Ouest*, although both of them attempted to saddle the construction of it on Guillaume Delisle and brought forward several documents to prove their case. No one had paid any attention to Fuca's story after it had been published until it became mixed up with the 'Fonte tale. We have already had occasion to examine maps of Guillaume Delisle. Not one of his printed maps now extant shows the *Mer de l'Ouest*, not even the last one, which he produced in 1722. If he had any notion of such a sea as far back as 1695, as was alleged by his younger brother, Joseph Nicolas, he must have obtained it from Lahontan-not from his book, but from some information disseminated by him after his return to France. That this may have happened may be supported by an examination of the sketch map, where the entrance to the *Mer de l'Ouest* is between 44° and 45° and could not, therefore, have been Fuca's strait. This entrance, which later did duty as one of the outlets of the *Mer de l'Ouest*, has a legend attached to it on Delisle's Carte Generale that it was discovered by Martin Aguilar in 1603. This legend had even appeared on Guillaume Delisle's map of 1722, but between 45° and 46°. The only contemporary printed map which seems to correspond even remotely to the views of Guillaume Delisle, according to his brother, is one issued by Pierre Mortier. This is certainly a copy of a Delisle map, but the entrance to the *Mer de l'Ouest* is almost four degrees wide, and the sea itself extends east even beyond the meridian of Mexico. If Delisle took his notice of this Entree de Aguilar from Torquemada's account of the Vizcaino expedition, he made a grievous error, because Aguilar, who was a member of that expedition, discovered a river which he said was in about 43° and referred to it as a "swift-flowing river," so swift, in fact, that he could not ascend it. In order to bolster up their theory Delisle and Buache inserted in their pamphlets of 1753 *Conjectures sur l' Existence d'une Mer dans la partie Occidentale du Canada & du Mississippi* containing an extract from Torquemada's book about the discovery by Aguilar. The younger Delisle allows us to infer that the *Conjectures* was written by his brother Guillaume in 1695. If Guillaume really wrote these *Conjectures* in that year it is the only use that Wagner has found that anyone had made of Torquemada's book before it was reprinted in 1729 or 1730.

North of the *Mer de l'Ouest* on Delisle's maps of 1750 and later will be found the imaginary Fonte geography and farther west his ideas about the Russian discoveries. Considering that he had been in Russia, the latter are singularly inaccurate. One would judge that he knew nothing about the movements of Captain Bering in the St. Peter in 1741. The great Alaska Peninsula which had been discovered by Bering is totally lacking. Under these circumstances it is not strange that as soon as the map appeared Delisle was attacked from all sides. The most destructive criticism was published in London by John Green in 1753. Green's remarks were issued to accompany *A New Chart of North and South America*, which was published in his behalf by Thomas Jefferys. Green stamped as fictitious or forgeries both the stories of Fuca and Fonte and made some caustic criticisms of Delisle. He charged him with having altered to 63° on the map of June 15, 1752, the latitude of the Rio de los Reyes of Fonte, from 53° as given in the text of that story. As Delisle in his next map, issued in September, reduced the latitude of the river to 53°, he tacitly acknowledged the correctness of Green's remarks. The most extensive attack on the theory, however, was written by Burriel, in Tomo III of the *Noticia de la California* published in Madrid in 1757. He included a Spanish translation of Fonte's letter.

It was thus demonstrated that Fonte's tale was impossible and that Buache's map did not even correspond to it; yet many geographers accepted it, and many maps of the latter part of the 18th century will be found which display Fonte's alleged discoveries and the vast *Sea of the West*

in the northern part of North America near the northwest coast. The vogue attained by the Delisle-Buache maps was principally attributable to the immense reputation enjoyed by Guillaume Delisle in the 18th century and to the increased interest in the search for the Northwest Passage. This search was suspended for some time after the voyage of 1746 but the subject remained a very live one. In spite of Green's criticism, the Delisle-Buache maps had a more friendly reception in England than in France. The principal French geographers of the day, especially Jacques Nicolas Bellin, whose hydrographical charts were in great demand and whose opinion carried great weight, refused to indorse the Fuca and Fonte stories. Although not a believer in either of them, he had put on his map of the world in 1755 (583) the *Mer de l'Ouest* with the Entree de Juan de Fuca in about 47° and that of Aguilar in about 44°. His skepticism, however, was displayed by a remark that "here the *Mer de l'Ouest* might be put." On his *Carte de l' Amerique Septentrionale* of the same year the *Mer de l'Ouest* is simply a name in the ocean with a legend that nothing is known of these parts. On his *Carte reduite de l'Ocean Septentrionale* of 1766 the "Mer" has disappeared, but we still see on the coast the Entree de Martin Aguilar, that of Jean de Fuca in 47.5°, and a *Pretendue R. de los Reyes de L'Amiral de Fonte en 1640*, familiar features of the Buache-Delisle maps.

The amazing absurdities of both Buache and Delisle constitute a most interesting episode in the imaginary geography of the northwest coast of America. Wagner treated the subject exhaustively in his *Apocryphal Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America*, and believe that facts enough have been disclosed in that study to dispel forever the ideas still entertained by some people that the Fuca legend and that of Lorenzo Ferrer Maldonado, which did not appear until much later, although of earlier date than that of the other, had some basis in fact. There are, however, some curious coincidences for which there can be no explanation. The strait of Michael Lok, which became known in literature as the *Strait of Juan de Fuca*, actually occupied or covered at least the strait which is now known as "Juan de Fuca," named, of course, after the Greek pilot although the actual strait in no wise corresponds, except roughly in latitude, to Fuca's description of it. Another coincidence is the seeming identification of Maldonado's strait with the present Bering Strait. The Maldonado narrative is so confused that it would be impossible to state where he thought his strait was, but the description of it given by him is quite sufficient to prove that it could not have been Bering Strait, irrespective of the fact that the notion that anyone could have sailed across the Polar Ocean in 1588 from the Atlantic to the Pacific is too incredible to be believed.

The Fonte narrative seems to have received some recognition because of the assertion in it about the archipelago which he discovered and the various inland passages, and the fact that these in a way correspond to those on the Atlantic side of the continent. A further coincidence may be mentioned in this connection, and that is that there is an archipelago in the neighborhood of 53° and that there are numerous passages leading inland for some distance. This archipelago and these passages were apparently first discovered by Captains Colnett, Dixon, and Duncan, in the latter part of the 18th century. Colnett was so impressed by the coincidence that he thought that he had discovered the passage by which Fonte had penetrated the continent. This was obviously the Douglas Channel. He did not follow it to its end and consequently found nothing to alter his opinion. It was not until Jacinto Caamafio explored this channel in 1792, and in fact others in the neighborhood, that Colnett's theory was exploded. Vancouver made some search for the passage in the following year, and even examined others to the north and south of the Douglas Channel, looking for Fonte's Rio de los Reyes, but naturally without success.

In an attempt to simplify this topic, Don McGuirk developed a terminology for the various cartographic forms of the *Mer de l'Ouest* within his cartobibliography. In his view there are, with a few exceptions, eight forms of the *Mer de l'Ouest*. This "type list" does not include maps that identify the Pacific Ocean as the *Mer de l'Ouest*. Almost all images of a *Mer de l'Ouest* will fall into one of these eight categories. Those few

exceptions are noted in his carto-bibliography. Below are some of my favorite maps that display this long-persistent myth.

Guillaume Delisle (1675-1726) may have ushered in a new era of scientific precision among French cartographers, but the great geographer was also inadvertently and indirectly responsible for one of the great cartographic myths of the 18th century: the *Mer de l'Ouest* [the Sea of the West]. This vast inland sea in the Pacific Northwest appeared on more than 200 printed maps from 1700 until 1810, the majority of them from French cartographers. Delisle had depicted the sea on some of his early manuscript maps but never included it on a published map; it would have violated his sense of scientific integrity to print a map with such a large, unverified geographical feature. Fellow Parisian cartographer Jean-Baptist Nolin did not share the same compunction—he plagiarized Delisle's manuscripts and published the first printed map to feature the Sea of the West in 1700.

The *Sea of the West* only appeared on a small scattering of maps over the next five decades, until it was revived in 1750 by Delisle's heirs, Philippe Buache (Guillaume's son-in-law) and Joseph Nicolas Delisle (Guillaume's half-brother). Their new representation of the *Mer de l'Ouest*, based on an apocryphal account of the voyage of Admiral de Fonte, brought controversy—and a slew of new maps featuring the spurious sea in a variety of formations. It was only after the Pacific Coast expeditions of Captains James Cook and George Vancouver in the late 18th century that the *Sea of the West* began to fade from maps.



The Mer de l'Ouest makes its debut on a printed map, from Nolin's Le Globe Terrestre Représenté en Deux Plans-Hemispheres (1700)

The *Mer de l'Ouest* first appeared on a printed map in the year 1700. A contemporary of Guillaume Delisle named Jean Baptiste Nolin produced a very large and detailed map of the world, *Le Globe Terrestre Représenté en Deux Plans-Hemispheres*. This map included a *Mer de l'Ouest* similar to those of Delisle. Apparently, Nolin had obtained one of Delisle's manuscript globes and transferred its geography onto his wall map. This indiscretion did not go unnoticed by Delisle and led to a charge of plagiarism. Seven years later, Nolin was forced to turn over his plates to Delisle, allowing him to remove the "offending geography," and Delisle was also allowed to destroy any of Nolin's wall maps that he found.

J. N. Delisle and Buache played a significant role in popularizing the myth. Before their manuscript map was presented to the Royal Academy of Sciences on April 8, 1750, and then published in 1752, only 15 maps and their varied states showed a *Mer*

de l'Ouest. The myth was dying. They literally resurrected this myth and hundreds of maps with a Mer de l'Ouest followed.



Mortier's *Mappe-Monde Geo-Hydrographique, ou Description Generale du Globe Terrestre et Aquatique en Deux Plans Hemispheres* (ca. 1700)



*A New Map of America From the latest Observations Revised by J. Senex Most humbly Inscribed
Lower left: I. Harris Fecit.*

Cartographer: John Senex

Date: 1720

Size: 19 x 22 inches

The large, beautifully engraved cartouche showing Indians in various activities is uncolored. John Harris was the engraver. John Senex updated an earlier map published by Christopher Brown in 1685 and 1700. This map published in New General Atlas (London: for Daniel Brown, 1721). This map includes both North and South America. California is shown as an island. A large fictional lake, The Great Lake of Thoago or Thoya, appears in western Canada. The Mississippi River is shown draining into the Gulf of Mexico near the mouth of the Rio Grande.

Senex's map is curious for several reasons. First, unlike most maps of the period, Senex adds a conjectural northwest coastline, which includes a number of islands and several lakes, including Aquinonbock, Lake of Isles and the The Great Lake of Thoago or Thoya. On the coastline, Desolation and Zapozipin Bays appear north of 60 degrees. Two other remarkable features in Senex's map includes the odd unnamed river with its headwaters in the Florida panhandle and the unique shape of South America.

Remarkably, this is one of the few English language maps to show California as an island, appearing after Kino's location of the headwaters of the Colorado debunked the insular myth. It is indeed curious that despite noting the islands and other features along the Northwest coast, Wagner gives no real explanation of the source of the information, which certainly predates the Russian discoveries and information furnished by Joseph De L'Isle and Philippe Buache.

The only other appearance of this odd coastline would appear to be in the 1703 edition of Peter Heylyn's *Cosmography*. Mead Cain wrote in *The Map Collector* (TMC) 57 that the source of the map was Robert Morden. Both maps include the odd coastline and apophrycal river rising from the Florida Panhandle. The river rising from the Florida Panhandle is oddly lacking on Senex's edition of the Browne map.



This map contains two popular myths of the time: California as an island and the Sea of the West



Carte Des Nouvelles Decouvertes Au Nord de la Mer de Sud, Tant a l'Est de la Sibirie et du Kamtchateka, Qu'a l'Ouest de la Nouvelle France, Dressée sur les Memoires ... 1750

Cartographer: Joseph Nicholas De L'Isle & Philippe Buache

Date: 1750

Size: 37 x 63 cm

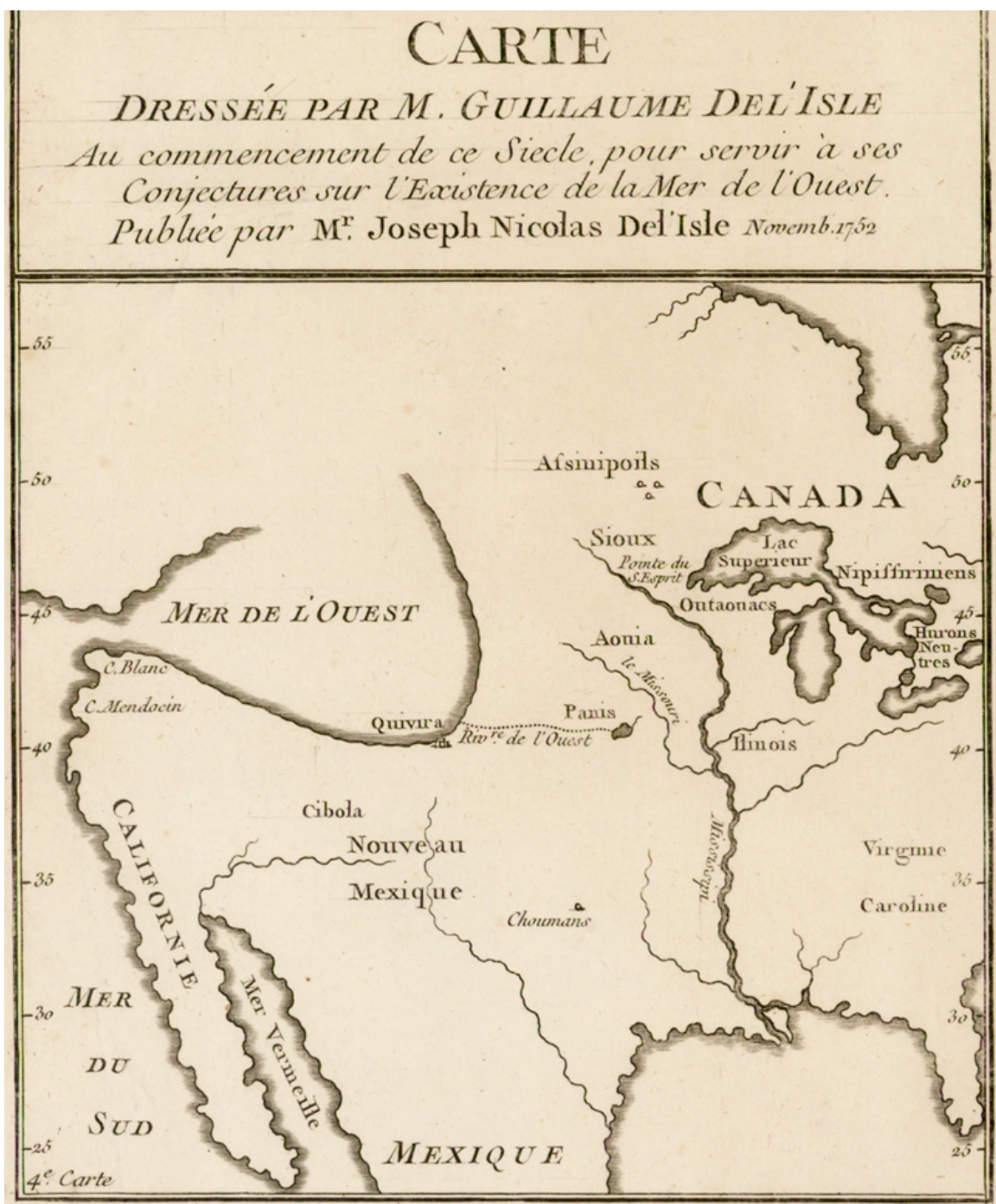
Description: A landmark map in the history of cartography and perhaps the single most influential map of the region in the middle of the 18th century. This map was a cartographic landmark, representing the most important advances in the mapping of this region prior to Captain James Cook. The map reported the discoveries of numerous Russian explorers, including Tchirkow and Vitus Bering and several overland expeditions, as well as the routes of Frondat, Spanberg, and other Europeans. The Manila Galleon route is also shown. While the treatment of the northwest coast of America is largely conjectured with the information largely derived from Russian sources.

Extending to Korea in the west and showing the whole of North America, it marks out the supposed discoveries of Admiral de Fonte, including a vast inland sea, the Mer de L'Ouest, to the north of California, a waterway from the Pacific almost to Baffin's Bay, and a large landmass in the middle of the Pacific. The mythical Bay of the West is shown along with a large Lake titled Lac De Valasco in what is now Alaska. The figure in the upper left is a native of Kamtchatka and in the upper right is a figure of a native of Louisiana.

Joseph Nicholas De L'Isle spent much of his career in Russia, producing the Atlas Russicus (the first Russian atlas) with Ivan Kyrilov and founding Russia's Royal Academy of Sciences at St Petersburg. He returned to Paris in 1747 with a large map collection, including the manuscript of this map of the North Pacific. In 1750 he presented the map to a public assembly of the French Academy of Sciences.



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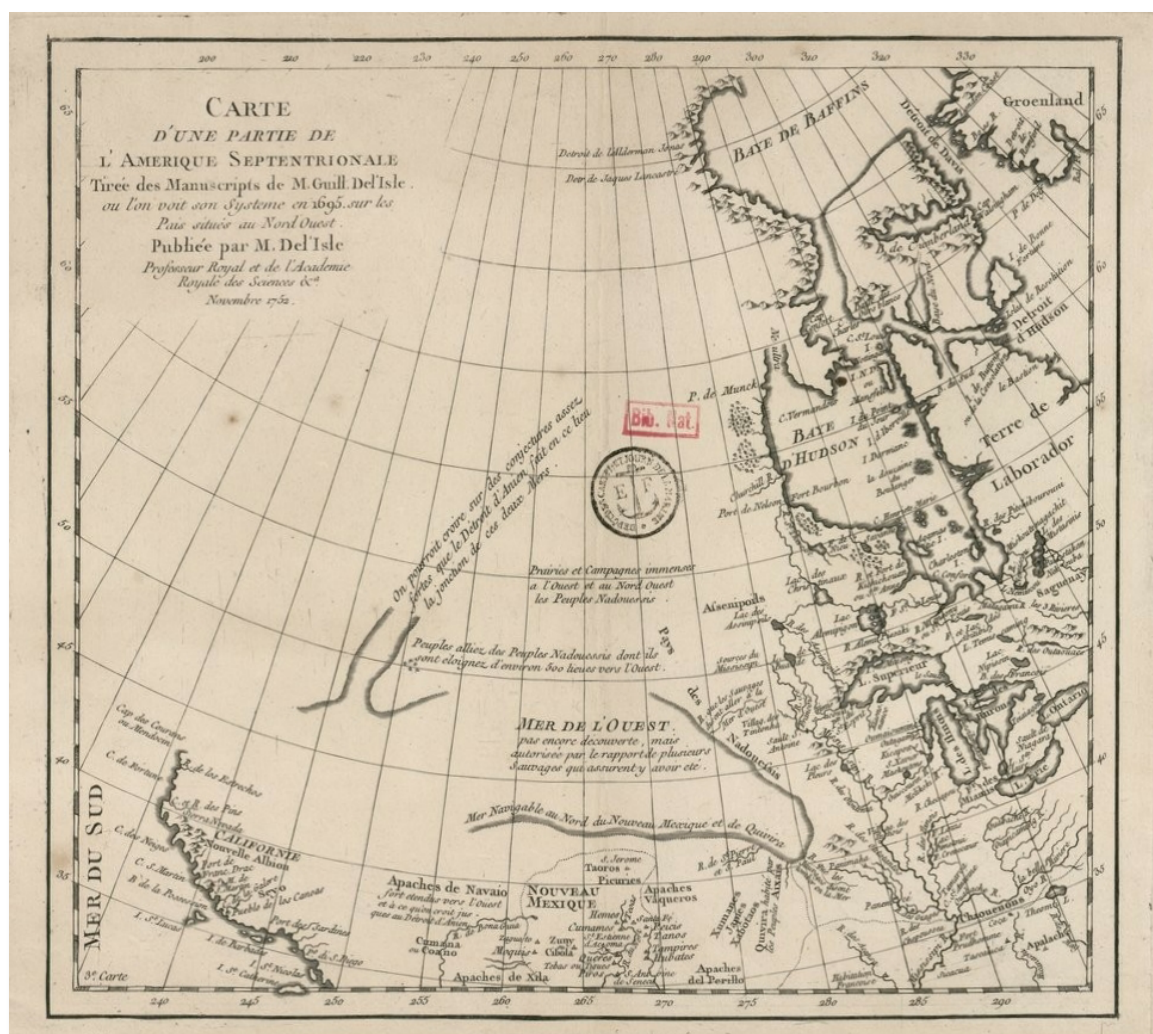


J. N. Delisle's Carte Dressée par M. Guillaume Del'Isle au Commencement de ce Siecle, pour Servir à ses Conjectures sur l'Existence de la Mer de l'Ouest (c. 1753)



A Map of the Icy Sea in which the several Communications with the Land Waters and other new Discoveries are exhibited. 1760 by John Gibson

Numerous maps of North America and the Arctic issued in the mid to late 19th century feature this massive speculative inland sea in the American Pacific Northwest referred to as the Sea of the West (Mer l'Ouest). The earliest printed map to feature the sea was Jean-Baptiste Nolin's 1742 *L'Amerique ou le Nouveau Continent*, Nolin likely copied the relevant cartography from an unpublished manuscript discovered in Guillaume De l'Isle (1675 - 1726) posthumous papers - although it seems likely that he either did not see the De l'Isle manuscript clearly Or only heard about it, as his cartography is substantively different from that proposed by De l'Isle. The notion nonetheless achieved vigorous support in intellectual circles, as it made the idea of an inland naval passage through North America seem more practical. In 1752, it was embraced by Jacques Nicholas De l'Isle, Guillaume's younger brother, and Philip Buache, who boldly presented the sea in conjunction with the high-integrity discoveries of Vitus Bering's Great Northern Expedition (1733 - 1743) in the Siberian Arctic. Although De l'Isle and Buache were immediately attacked Over the sea of the west by other intellectuals, the Sea of the West appeared on many maps until generally disproved by the expeditions of Cook, Vancouver, and La Perouse.



Delisle, 1762





L'Amérique Septentrionale divisee en ses principaux Etats...1762 [Sea of the West]

Cartographer: Jean Janvier

Date: 1762

Size: 17.5 x 12 inches

Decorative example of Janvier's fascinating map of North America, featuring the Sea of the West myth, Russian discoveries in northwest America and a host of other interesting details. The map is known in a number of transitional states, of which this state is perhaps the most interesting. The Tchirikow/De L'Isle coastline reminiscent of the Alaskan Archipelago remains shown above the words *Mer Du Sud*, but the connection to the mainland has been replaced with open sea.

The Bay of the West appears in its usual configuration, which is present in at least three states of this map, as are the configurations of the Straits of Juan De Fuca and Martin Aguilar. The *Archipel St Lazare* appears in a region which was previously land locked. The mythical river system crossing Canada is still in evidence. *Lac Michinipi ou des Assinibouels* is shown. The sources of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers are shown, albeit speculatively so. A few early French forts still appear in the Trans-Appalachian West.

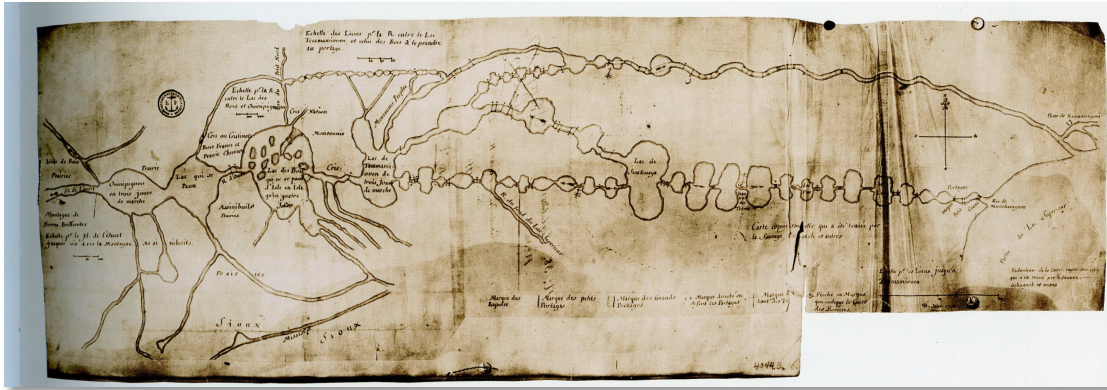


La Verendrye and the Elusive 'River of the West'

Explorers of the 17th-18th century had barely the slightest concept of the topography of North America's west and northwest. Fur traders Pierre and Paul Mallet had in 1739 reported uncharted mountains at the head of the Platte River, but it was only towards the end of that century that the Rocky Mountains would be recognized as an unbroken chain bisecting the continent. Exploration of the northwest coast was slow to get underway, the Spanish pioneers having charted only the Californian coast, while navigators from the Siberian mainland in the 1740s saw only Alaska. The widely accepted narrative of the apocryphal voyager Bartolome de Fonte had spawned the myth of a 'Strait of Anian', which directly connected the Atlantic and Pacific, together with a 'Mer de l'Ouest/Sea of the West' - a vast gulf submerging most of western Canada. The Rockies still unknown, it seemed reasonable to locate the major watershed a little beyond Lake Superior, from where a hypothetical 'River of the West' meandered towards the fabled gulf and hence the Pacific. Native reports seemed to confirm the suspicion, placing a 'great sea' (actually Lake Winnipeg) not too far away to the northwest.

It was the quest for the 'River of the West' that would occupy Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, sieur de La Verendrye, for twelve years of his life. A Canadian-born ex-soldier, he had spent fifteen years fanning in Quebec before joining the fur traders around Lake Nipigon. Assisted by three sons, his explorations began in earnest in 1731, and over the next few years he established a chain of forts between lakes Superior and Winnipeg. In 1738, heavily criticized for concentrating on the profit from furs at the expense of new discoveries, and of delegating too much of the exploratory work to his

subordinates and family, he attempted to restore his personal prestige by taking an expedition into Mandan country, present-day North Dakota. There a mighty river, the Missouri, had been reported - surely La Verendrye's long-sought 'River of the West'. But curiously, after venturing some 2,400 kilometers [1,500 miles], he halted just a few kilometers short of the river, while a son sent ahead failed to recognize that the river flowed east not west. Now in his fifties and physically exhausted, La Verendrye placed subsequent expeditions in the hands of his sons who, within a few years, opened vast swathes of territory from South Dakota to Wyoming and northwest to Saskatchewan.



A map drawn for La Verendrye by his native guide Auchagah, showing the extensive network of lakes and portages to the west of Lake Superior.

Vérendrye's initial information on this river came from some maps of the region west of Lake Superior he was given by local Indians, including by a Cree named Auchagach in 1728. Auchagach's maps showed the system of rivers and lakes which flowed into Lake Superior from the northwest, which were shown as arising in a "River of the West" which started near some Mountains of the Bright Stones, flowed into Lake Winnipegosis and then on to the Lake of the Woods. Vérendrye had Auchagach's maps copied in manuscript, and one of those was copied by Bellin onto his map of North America from 1743.

Auchagach's maps were, of their type, quite good, but by the time his water system made it onto Bellin's map, it was far from reality. Auchagach's maps had neither orientation nor scale indicated and Bellin erred in both these aspects when he copied them to his map. The actual river systems to the northwest of Lake Superior have a much more Northwest-Southeast orientation than the almost straight West-to-East alignment shown by Bellin, and Bellin shows the river systems as much larger than they are in reality. While Bellin does not show a definite Pacific coast in the west, his River of the West extends very close to wherever that coast would be, presenting what appears to be an easy water route to the Pacific. As good as this looked on Bellin's map, failed French attempts in pursuing this route to the Pacific in the following years soon demonstrated the fallacy of Bellin's depiction.

The Vérendrye family influence on the story of the River of the West, however, extended further than this. In 1738, continuing to look for a water route to the Pacific, the Vérendryes traveled west from Lake Winnipeg along the Assiniboine River, then dropped south into what is today North Dakota. There they came to a village of a tribe they called the Mantannes. The sons then visited a village further on which they said was located on the "*Riviere des Mantannes*." About this river Pierre later wrote:

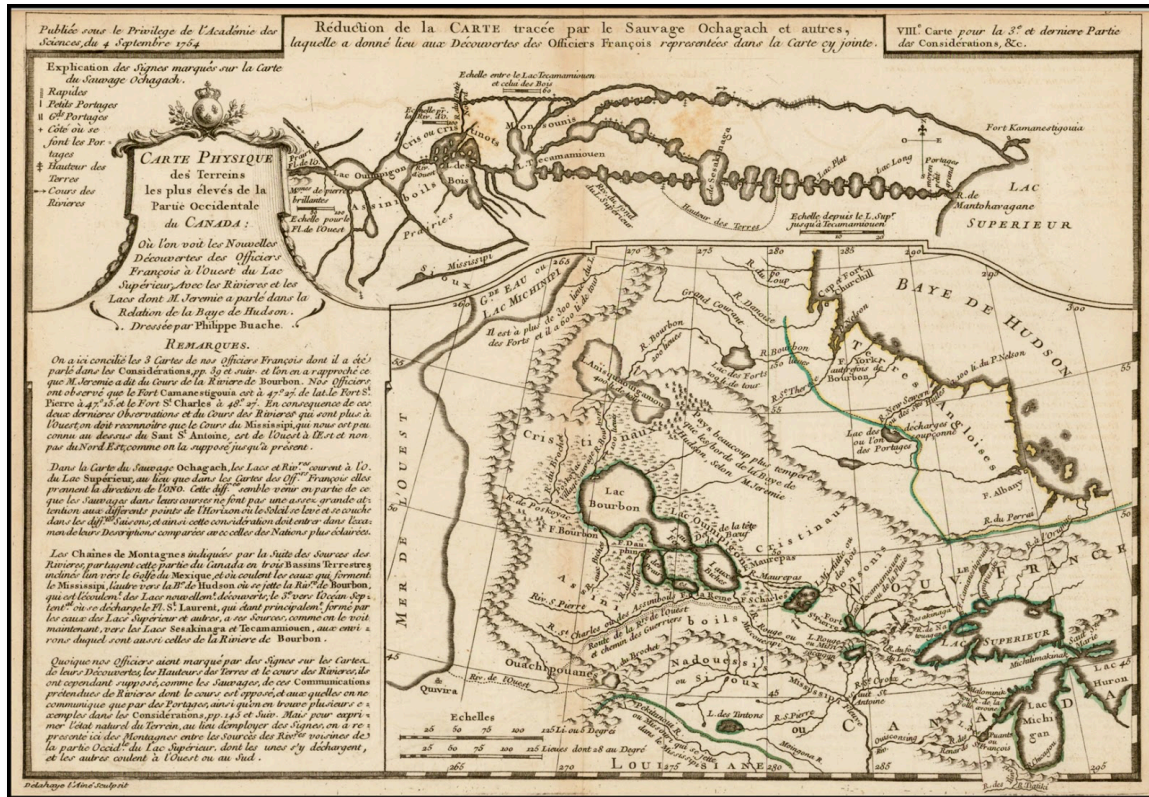
"I discovered recently a river flowing to the west... That the river appeared to go, according to the compass, south west by south...the lower part may go to the sea to the south west by west." That is, the river may flow to the Pacific Ocean.



Carte de L'Amerique Septentrionale, 1743, N. Bellin

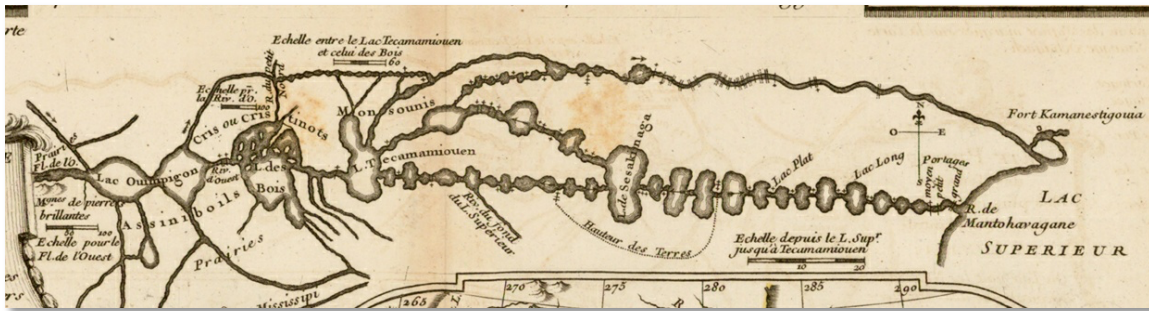


According to a scholarly study, the Vérendrye sons had probably visited a Hidatsa village [though the names are similar, the Mantannes were almost certainly not Mandans, as they are often thought to be]. The village was located just south of the conjunction of the Little Knife River with the Missouri, on a part of the Missouri where it looks like the river flows south/southwest. The perceived direction of the river flow, combined with information gathered from conversations with the Indians interpreted through the lens of their hopes, led the Vérendryes to conclude the river might be the much desired River of the West. Philippe Buache included his take on their "discovery" in his 1754 map of western New France shown below.

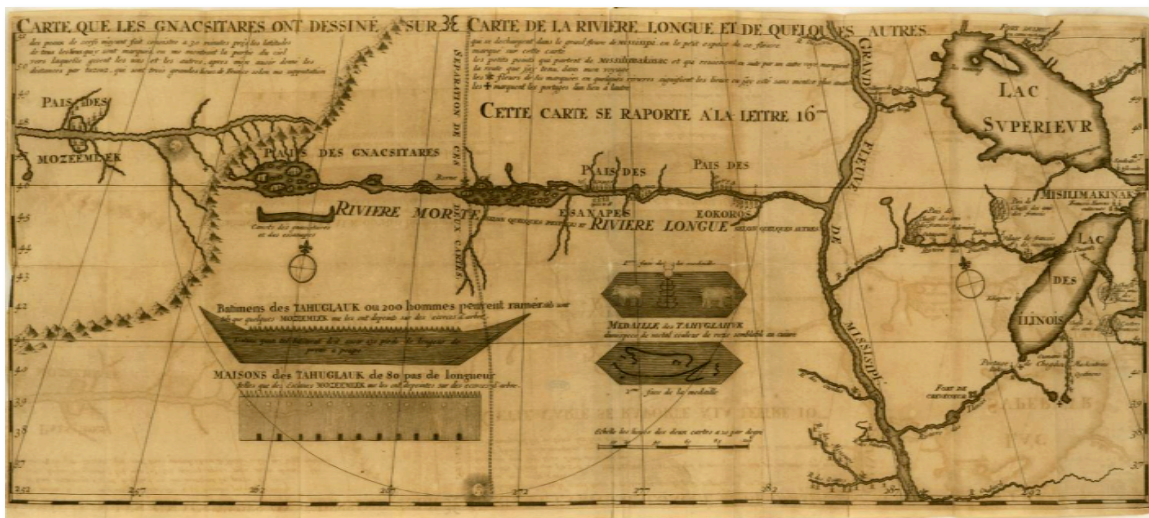


Carte Physique des Terres les plus élevées de la Partie Occidentale du Canada,
Philippe Buache, 1754

Interestingly, though by the time it was issued, Buache included another version of Auchagach's map in a panel at the top of the map. This is similar to the one shown on Bellin's map, but by 1754 it was not something that was generally believed by the French. In the main part of the map, Buache shows his take on the Vérendryes' discoveries. The Assiniboine River is shown flowing east-west below Lake Winnipeg, and along its side is a trail labeled as 'warrior's route to the River of the West.' This path crosses a ridge of mountains and comes to an "Ouachipouanes" village (the Cree name for the Mandan), which is located on a river that shortly makes a large bend to the west. Soon after it turns west, this river becomes a dotted line labeled "Riv. de l'Ouest."



Buache tried to merge this Vérendrye information with previous beliefs, so he has another river, which flows out of a "L. du Brochet," merge with the dotted-line River of the West [this coming from Delisle's 1722 map] and this river in turn flows into our old friend the Sea of the West.



Carte que les Gnacsitares ant Dessine sur des peaux de Cerfs ..., 1703

Map of the western Great Lakes, Riviere Longue and land west to the Rocky Mountains.

Cartographic elements include scale, degrees of latitude and longitude, location of native American settlements and European forts, and includes illustration of dwellings, canoes, and medals of the Tahuglauk.



Map of North America With the European Settlements & whatever else is remarkable in ye West indies, from the latest and best Observations

Explorer: Lahontan, Louis Armand de Lom d'Arce baron de, 1666-1715? Engraver: Seale, Richard William

Publication Date: 1744?

Publisher: Tindal, N. (Nicolas), 1687-1774, Rapin de Thoyras, M. (Paul), 1661-1725

Place of Publication: England--London

Original Source: The History of England, translated and continued by N. Tindal, Vol. 3. London: Paul Rapin de Thoyras.

Legends:

- Printed in cartouche in lower right: A Map of North America With the European Settlements & whatever else is remarkable in ye West indies, from the latest and best Observations. Printed below border in lower right: R.W. Seale delin. et Sculp.
- Printed in lower right is a key showing symbols for *European Cities and Towns*, *Indian Towns*, *Forts and Castles*.
- Printed in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean along tracks: *Course of the Flora to avoid the Trade Winds*. *Homeward bound Course of the Armada*. *Course of the Galeons from Old Spain*.
- Printed beneath 30 degrees latitude next to the east coast of North America: *The South Boundary of Carolina by the last Charter*.

- Printed beneath an unnamed lake in far northwest just south of High Mountains: *Many Indian Towns on these Islands.*
- Printed along the Morte or Longue River north of the High Mountains: *So far B. la Hontan travel'd 1690.*

The map depicts North America, divided into several regions including California, New Mexico, New Britain, Nova Scotia, Florida, Louisiana and Florida. Mexico and Central America are divided into several regions including *Apacheria*, *New Leon*, *Culiacan*, *New Biscay*, *Gallicia*, *Guasteca*, *Panuco*, *Mechoachan*, *Xalisco*, *Mexico*, *Tlascala*, *Guaxaca*, *Tabasco*, *Vera Pax*, *Guatimala*, *Honduras*, *Nicaragua*, *Jucaton*, *Co. Rica* and *Darien*. Also shown are the Caribbean islands, Cuba, the Bahamas, Jamaica, and the northern part of South America. The eastern coast of North America shows the British Colonies including South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, and New England. Of note, California is shown as an island with the body of water separating California from North America as the Gulf of California or Red Sea. Northern California is labeled as *New Albion* and contains a mountain chain with one mountain on the northwest California coast labeled as *Mt. St. Martin*. In the Gulf of Mexico and in the Atlantic Ocean the routes of Spanish Galleons, the *Armada* and the *Flota* are shown. Areas inhabited by the North American Indian tribes are labeled including territory occupied by the Cherokee and the Apaches. Shows detailed river and place names including the Mississippi River, the Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence Seaway and Hudson's Bay. Also depicts mountains in the west in an area labeled as *Great Teguaio* and in *Parts Unknown*. Shows compass rose in upper right. The title cartouche is adorned with flowers and ornate decoration.



Detail showing the desire to find a navigable water-route through the continent

Richard William Seale (1732-1785) was an English draughtsman and engraver who worked for a number of individuals engraving maps for atlases and other books. He worked for Henry Popple (1733, #531), Tindal for his translation and continuation of

Rapin's *The History of England* (1744-7), Pine and Tinney (1749), Bolton's *North America* (1750), Stow (1756) and *Universal Magazine* (1747-63).

This particular map was published in Rapin's *The History of England*, volume 3, translated by Nicolas Tindal. According to Wheat, despite its late publication date of 1744 (1745?), the map continues to display a number of "throwback notions" of North American geography. For instance, the map follows the geography from apocryphal accounts by Baron Louis-Armand de Lom D'Arce de Lahontan in the late 17th century. Moreover, California is shown as an island. Within California, a mountain chain is shown and two mountains are actually labeled: *M. Nevada* and *Mt. St. Martin*. Six towns are also labeled in California including *Canot*, *St. Nicholas*, *St. Juan*, *St. Isidore*, *Gigante* and *Na Sa de la Guada*.

Baron Louis-Armand de Lom D'Arce de Lahontan was a French military officer who served in various campaigns in Canada during the late 17th century. In 1683, he was first stationed in Quebec as a lieutenant. He later fought the Iroquois in 1684. After some exploration in 1685 in which he ended up at the River Minnesota, he published an account of his adventures there in *Nouveau Voyages dans l'Amérique Septentrionale* (1703), including in it a map of a mythical area in which a large and lavish tribe allegedly lived. While the map shows a very large and very late example of an insular California, it is equally if not more fascinating for its marvelous treatment of the Mississippi Valley, Great Lakes and Transmississippi West treatment.

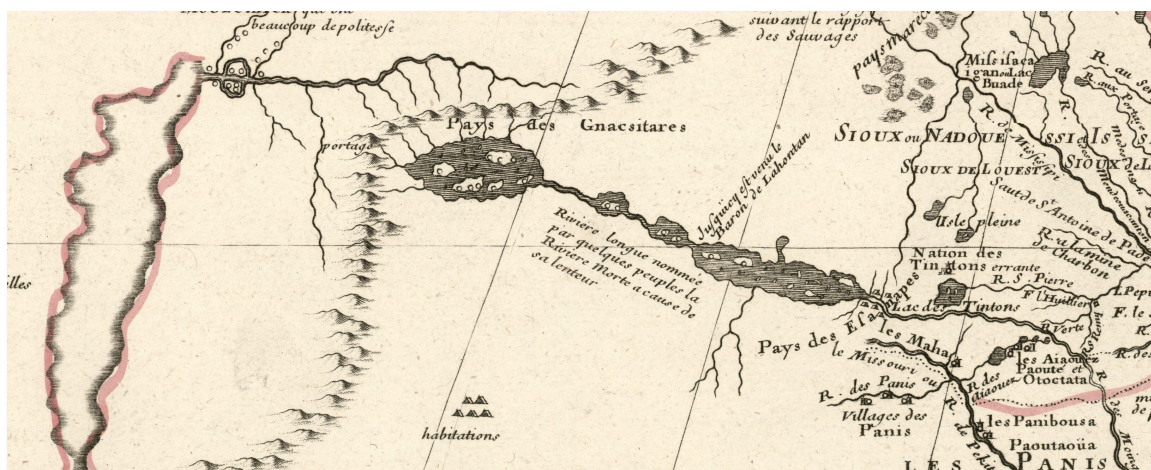
The mapping of the Mississippi and its tributaries is extremely detailed and includes a number of settlements. Nevertheless, it retains the exotic treatment of the source of the River as a series of Western Canadian Lakes, the last of which lists Indian Towns on its Islands. The treatment of the Red River and Missouri River are also unusual.

In the Atlantic, the *Homeward bound course of the* [Spanish] *Armada* is shown, along with the inbound *Course of the Galeons from Old Spain* below the title cartouche. The prevailing currents are also shown, along with a note in the Gulf of Mexico tracking the *Course of the Flota to avoid the Trade Winds*, showing the route taken by the Spanish Galleons from Mexico to Havana and through the Bahama Straits.

This attractive map is based on Popple's seminal map of 1733 (#531). It is one of the last maps to show the island of California although Seale incorporated some information from Kino in the Southwest. He also continued to portray fanciful details from Baron Lahontan's romantic tale of his 1688-90 travels west of the upper Mississippi River with the Longue River stretching to the Rocky Mountains. The *Straits of Anian* are noted, but most of the northwest is marked *Parts Unknown* and contains little data. Shading designates the trade winds with directional arrows showing the course of the winds.



Carte du Canada ou de la Nouvelle France, Guillaume Delisle, 1703



Detail: "Riviere Longue" and the Great Salt Lake?

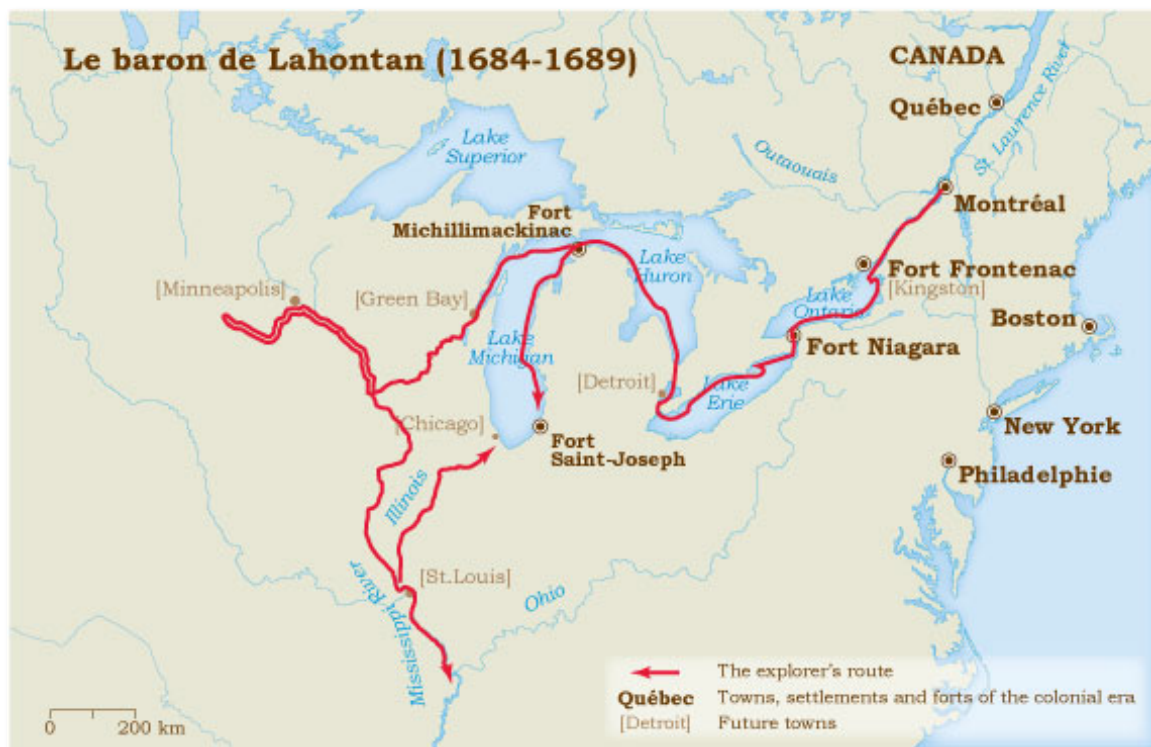
This map provided one of the best delineation of its period of the Great Lakes and has been noted by R.V. Tooley as the first map to include Detroit only two years after the founding of that village by Cadillac. Although Delisle depicts Louis-Armand de Lom d'Arce de Lahontan's fictional "*Riviere Longue*" to the west and indicates the point at

which his journey was supposed to have ended and where his secondhand reports from natives began, Delisle himself is skeptical: "*Unless the Seigneur de Lahonton has invented all of these things, which is difficult to resolve, he being the only one who has penetrated this vast land.*" The map also includes a note referring to a large body of salt water to the west " ... *sur la quelle ils navigant avec de grands bateaux*" - a possible, early reference to the Great Salt Lake or a tantalizing hint of an easy passage to the Pacific.



1710 John Senex English edition

*A Lake of Salt water 30 Leagues
in 300 about according to the
report of the Savages Who allso say
that the mouth of it is at a great dis-
tance from the South Coast and is
but 2 leagues broad, That there is
above 100 Towns about it, And that
they Sail on it with large Boats.*



A Map of North America by Herman Moll, 1715



An example of Antonio Zatta's 1776 map of the northwestern parts of America and the northeastern parts of Asia. This map is one of the most sought after and decorative 18th century pre-Cook maps of the Pacific Northwest. The map covers the region from the Hudson Bay and the Great Lakes westward as far as Siberia and Japan, north well into the Arctic, and southwards as far as Cabo San Lucas in Baja California. In this stunning map, Zatta, combining almost every 17th and 18th century myth and fact of the American west into a single map, offers up a veritable smorgasbord of speculative geography.

East of *Fusang*, Zatta illustrates the apocryphal *River of the West*. This river, based upon a misinterpretation of the Mississippi as described by the indigenous American Indians of the Great Lakes region, started appearing on maps as early as the Bellin map of 1743 and remained well into the early 19th century. Zatta maps the *River of the West* as flowing almost directly westward from L. Salso, near Moozemlek in the land of the Tahuglauks. While this is clearly a reference to the Great Salt Lake, we find it fascinating that Zatta is able to map it in the same year that it supposedly entered western literature as Lake Timpanagos. Silvestre Vélez de Escalante was a Franciscan missionary who identified the Great Salt Lake in 1776 from indigenous accounts. Since there is no way Zatta could have been familiar with Escalante's account, we can only assume that the reference came from an earlier text. In this case, it may have been that of the French explorer Baron de Lahontan. Lahontan's explorations are highly criticized as near or total fabrications, nonetheless, his work did have a significant impact on the cartography of the region, Lahontan's wonderful narrative, *Nouveaux Voyages de M. le Baron de Lahontan*, describes his voyage westward from the Great Lakes along the Wabash to the Mississippi. From the Mississippi he continues almost directly westward along a river



Nolin's smaller Mer de l'Ouest, from his *L'Amerique ou le Nouveau Continent Dressee sur les Memoires les Plus Nouveaux...* (1720)



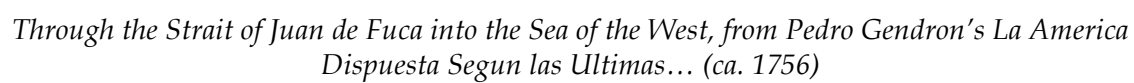
The Sea of the West on the *Carte Generale Des Decouvertes De L'Amiral De Fonte et eutres Navigateurs Espagnols Anglois et Fusses pour le recherche du Passage a la Mer du Sud* par M. De l'Isle..., 1752

A fascinating map of the Northwest Coast, showing De L'Isle's conjectural northwest coast, based upon De Font and Russian Discoverers, including the *Sea of the West*. The map is part of the great mid-18th century debate, spurred by the reports of Joseph Nicholas De L'Isle, of the Russian discoveries in the region prior to 1750, which he obtained during his time working in St. Petersburg. The debate was fed by the maps of Buache and Jefferys, which provided radically different accounts.

Another key map of the Sea of the West is Buache's final correction of the original map. Buache struggled with his first attempts, leaving the northern shore of his *Mer de l'Ouest* undefined. He finally resolved the problem with several maps in 1755, including his map *Mappemonde à l'Usage du Roy*, which he attributed to his father-in-law, Guillaume Delisle. Many of the cartographers that followed chose one of these two formats for their own *Mer de l'Ouest*.



Buache's revised sea, from his Mappemonde a l'Usage du Roy par Guillaume Delisle... (1755)





Pierre Mortier, 1705



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